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University of Lethbridge iGEM teams bring home medals

After devoting months of work to their projects, the University of Lethbridge's high school and collegiate iGEM teams brought home the hardware at the recent iGEM grand jamboree held in Paris.

The 26-member collegiate team was awarded a gold, with a dozen team members making the trip to Paris for the competition. The 18-member high school team was awarded a silver and attended the jamboree virtually.



“We are the only university in the province that won gold,” says Dr. Vineet Rathod, team supervisor. “I was proud of the students, and they felt proud, too. It’s the hard work of eight months; we started working on the project in February.”

The collegiate team project centred on developing an early detection kit that farmers could use to test for clubroot, a soil pathogen that affects canola, mustard and cole crops like broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower.

“Participating in iGEM has been an incredible experience for me,” says Jenna Letain, a master’s student in biochemistry. “Being able to apply my research knowledge towards a collective project while also mentoring a group of students has helped me grow as a graduate student. I highly recommend iGEM to any student who is looking to gain more experience working collaboratively as a team in a research setting.”

“It has been an unbelievable experience and I have gained an incredible amount of appreciation for the world of research beyond going to lectures at the university,” says Nolan Fomradas, a second-year biology student. “iGEM has exposed me to a great network of people, made me appreciate my studies even more and made me a better student.”

The 18-member high school team’s project focused on building a protein biosensor that would change colour in the presence of velvet fish disease. Velvet fish disease is a parasite that can

get into the slime coat of fish and eat away at their cells, eventually killing them. The only way to test for it now is by a visual inspection of the fish and by that time, it's usually too late for treatment.



“They did a great job,” says Dr. Laura Keffer-Wilkes, team supervisor. “I’m super, super proud of them. They did a really good job during their judging session.”

“I am thrilled about everything the team accomplished this year,” says Mercy Awosoga, a student at Catholic Central High School.

“Receiving silver is encouraging and

reflects all the hard work put into planning, community outreach, lab work, engineering, modelling and research. Throughout my iGEM experience, I have formed amazing friendships and understood the importance of collaboration.”

With their sights set on next year, recruitment of team members will soon get underway. Any high school students who’d like to participate in next year’s iGEM competition can contact Keffer-Wilkes at kefferwilkesl@uleth.ca. University students looking to get involved can get in touch with Rathod at vineet.rathod@uleth.ca.

This news release can be found online at [2023 iGEM results](#).

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Our University’s Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.